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POSTAL RATE AND FEE CHANGES, 1997

Docket No. R97-1

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF HARRY J. BUCKEL ON BEHALF OF THE SATURATION MAIL COALITION

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# TESTIMONY OF HARRY J. BUCKEL

# AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

1	My name is Harry J. Buckel. I am Chief Executive Officer of Newport Media,
2	Inc., the publisher of several shopper publications in Long Island, New York.
3	have held this position since 1996 when I purchased the company. I have been
4	involved in the community newspaper and advertising shopper industry for over
5	twenty years.
6	I received a BSBA Finance from Xavier University in 1966 and an MS degree
7	in Regional Economics from Michigan State University in 1970.
8	From 1970-72, I served as Assistant to the President and Vice President for
9	Finance and Development for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.
10	From 1972-1978, I held several management positions for the Panax
11	Corporation involving the publication of various community newspapers:
12	Director of Marketing;
13 14	General Manager of the <u>Community News</u> of Suburban Detroit (100,000 circulation);
15	Group Vice President, Southeast Michigan Newspapers;
16	Vice President, Corporate Staff and Assistant to the President;
17	Vice President, Publisher of the Miami Beach Sun Reporter
18	I joined Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc. in 1978 and served in the
19	following positions prior to becoming President of the PennySaver, a Harte-Hanks
20	shopper in Southern California:
21	President and Publisher, San Francisco Progress
22	President and Publisher, Ypsilanti Press
23	President and Publisher, Glouchester County Times

1 2	President and Publisher, Journal Publishing Company, Hamilton, Ohio
3	In 1982, I became Publisher of the PennySaver, a position I held until 1996 when I
4	left the company to form Newport Media, Inc. In addition, I served as a Corporate
5	Vice President and Senior Vice President of Harte-Hanks Communications (1986-
6	1996; 1991-96) and President of Harte-Hanks Shoppers (1987-1996).
7	Throughout my career, I have participated actively in advertising and
8	shopper industry affairs. In 1989, I served as Industry Co-Chairman of the
9	Postmaster General's Worksharing Task Force. I served as Executive Vice
0	Chairman of the Third Class Mail Association from 1989 to 1991, and as
11	Chairman of the Advertising Mail Marketing Association from 1991 through 1993.
12	In addition, I presented testimony to the Postal Rate Commission on behalf of
13	Harte-Hanks Shoppers in Dockets R90-1 and R94-1. Recently, I have been
14	involved in forming and organizing the Saturation Mailers Coalition, working closely
15	with other saturation mailers.

# **PURPOSE OF TESTIMONY**

I am testifying on behalf of the Saturation Mailers Coalition, a recently-
formed coalition of local, regional, and national companies involved in the
saturation mail advertising business. The Coalition supports the Postal Service's
proposed rates and rate structure for Standard A Enhanced Carrier Route (ECR)
Mail. The purposes of my testimony are to:
Describe the Saturation Mailers Coalition and the characteristics of its
members;
Describe the nature of the saturation mail advertising market and the
customers our industry serves, particularly the many small businesses
that use and depend upon saturation mail to reach their customers;
Describe the highly competitive nature of our business, particularly in
relation to non-postal competition;
Explain the importance to our industry and our customers of maintaining
affordable postal rates for saturation mail, and the benefits of the Postal
Service's proposal to moderate the current high pound rate for ECR
mail,
In addition, my testimony describes the operation of Newport Media Inc.,
including its production and distribution; the markets it serves, its customers and
competitors; and the significance and growing success of alternate delivery in our
markets.
THE SATURATION MAIL COALITION

I have long believed that mailers in the saturation mail industry, despite being competitors with one another, have strong common interests on postal issues, both as an industry and as representatives of our small business advertising customers. Over the last several years, I and other leaders in the

1 industry have informally discussed the idea of forming a coalition to cooperate and

participate in postal matters of mutual interest. These discussions ultimately led

to a meeting of industry representatives earlier this year and formation of the

4 Coalition. The Coalition is co-chaired by Norman Schultz, President and CEO of

Mail Marketing Systems in Jessup, Maryland, and Richard Mandt, owner of The

6 Flyer in Tampa, Florida.

Currently the Coalition has 36 members, listed in the appendix to my testimony. The membership reflects the diversity of the industry. It includes publishers of free community papers and shopper publications, shared mail programs, companies that also do solo saturation mailings, and organizations whose members are primarily interested in saturation mail issues. Although many of the members operate programs that are 100% mailed, a number also distribute a portion of their circulations via private delivery. The diversity is also reflected in the sizes of the members' programs and their markets, ranging from large national or regional mailers like Advo and Harte-Hanks who serve major metropolitan markets and provide total weekly circulation to millions of households, down to small local mailers like the Antigo Shoppers Guide in Antigo, Wisconsin who serve rural markets with weekly circulation to less than 20,000 households.

## THE SATURATION MAIL INDUSTRY

From my experiences with Harte-Hanks, mailer trade associations, and prior postal cases, I am aware of the common misperception that the saturation mail industry consists of only a few large mailers. In fact, the industry has a great diversity of companies offering a variety of mailing programs that, in total, reach virtually every household in the nation. The industry serves hundreds of thousands of advertisers, including not only large national retailers but predominantly small local businesses and individual entrepreneurs throughout the nation.

1	There are more than a thousand local and regional free community papers
2	and shopper publications in the United States, serving over 50 million
3	households. Roughly half are distributed by mail, and of those, virtually all are
4	mailed at Enhanced Carrier Route rates. Although many of these are 100 percent
5	advertising publications, many, like ours, contain local community news, free
6	announcements, and other non-advertising reader services and editorial matter.
7	These publications typically have a newspaper tabloid or booklet format, and many
8	also carry preprint advertising inserts.
9	The saturation mail industry also includes many saturation shared mail
10	programs. While Advo is the largest of these, with programs in major metropolitan
11	markets, there are a number of others that serve local or regional markets
12	throughout the country. In addition, there are a number of saturation coupon
13	programs serving local markets, either independently or through regional or
14	national franchise programs.
15	Regardless of the type or size of their programs, all saturation mailers
16	share many common market characteristics:
17 18	<ul> <li>The focus of all saturation mail programs, even those of regional or national companies, is on individual local markets.</li> </ul>
19 20 21	<ul> <li>All are geared toward serving local retailers, service businesses, and other advertisers who need to reach potential consumers who reside near their stores or businesses, typically within a radius of 2-5 miles.</li> </ul>
22 23 24 25	<ul> <li>The primary advertising appeal of saturation mail programs is for goods and services with potential appeal to a broad segment of consumers, such as groceries, fast food, local retailers, auto sales and services, and home-related services.</li> </ul>
26 27	<ul> <li>Small local business advertisers are an essential element of saturation mailers' success, and vice versa.</li> </ul>
28 29 30	<ul> <li>All operate in a highly competitive market, competing with each other, and with newspapers and private delivery companies for distribution of retail preprint inserts.</li> </ul>

 Saturation mail programs are mailed on a regular, predictable schedule, usually weekly or monthly, and are highly workshared.

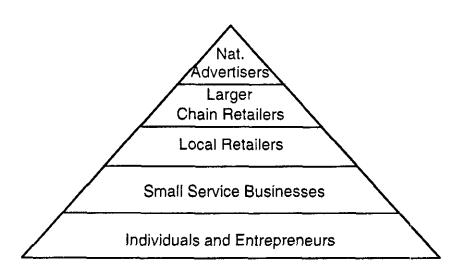
• Postage is typically their largest single cost item, and affordable postage rates play an important role in their ability to survive and grow.

The essential common element of saturation mail programs is that they offer accessible advertising targeted by geographic area, at affordable prices, to small local businesses that do not have cost-effective media alternatives. For many small businesses, the cost of advertising is second only to the owner's draw as a cost of doing business. Saturation mail is a vital component for small businesses that need to advertise their goods and services.

#### SATURATION MAIL CUSTOMERS

Saturation mail customers represent a wide range and size of businesses. They include a mixture of many small local service and retail businesses who have limited advertising resources and alternatives; and larger regional or national chains who have a number of competitive alternatives for distribution of preprint inserts, or even non-print media. While the precise mix of advertisers will vary from one saturation mailer to another, depending on the nature of its program and the specific markets it serves, this blending of large and small business advertisers is characteristic of saturation mail programs.

The customers that use saturation mail, regardless of size, all have a common objective: to reach consumers that live near their businesses. The makeup of these customers is quite diverse, but consists predominantly of small local businesses. If viewed as a pyramid, the foundation of saturation mail is individual service providers, entrepreneurs, and small "mom and pop" service businesses that constitute 60 to 80 percent of all saturation mail users:



The next tier is small to mid-size local retailers, such as local grocers, fast food and restaurants, hardware, and auto dealers and services, that comprise 15 to 20 percent of all saturation mail users. Larger chain retailers, both regional and national, constitute 5 to 10 percent of saturation mail users, but because of their broad advertising coverage and frequency they are often critical to the success of a saturation mail program. The final category of saturation mail users, comprising perhaps less than one percent of total saturation advertisers, is national advertisers, primarily food and consumer product manufacturers using the mail to

distribute coupons.

The small business focus of saturation mail is reflected in Newport Media's programs. The core of our business is the small retailer/service provider/ individual entrepreneur trying to sell goods or services in a limited geographic area around a single location. The majority of our ads are mailed to five or fewer zones (less than 60,000 households), reflecting the fact our advertisers are typically small businesses.

In a typical week, a single zoned edition of our book will carry over 600 advertisements, adding up to more than 12,000 ads weekly across all our zones. Although display ads account for more than half of the pages in our books, they represent less than 20% of our total advertisers. Even our full-page display

advertisers tend to be independent local businesses such as neighborhood grocery stores and car dealers, rather than national chain stores. Our partial-page display advertisers are even smaller businesses, like local home improvement contractors, dry cleaners, and auto repair businesses.

The smallest of our customers -- classified advertisers -- account for more than 80% of the ads we carry. Our classified ads include employment, real estate, auto, personals, and our largest single advertising category, service businesses and small entrepreneurs. This latter category is a small business potpourri: lawn and garden services, gutter, window and chimney cleaning, tree services, trash hauling, moving and storage, professional services, and every variety of home improvement and repair services from general contractors to handymen. Many of these ads are from the smallest of small businesses, individuals like a one-truck trash hauler whose livelihood depends on business generated by ads in our publication.

#### NEWPORT MEDIA INC. - SHOPPERS

Newport Media Inc. was formed in August of 1996. We are located in a single plant in Hicksville, New York, with five sales and marketing locations throughout the market area, currently employing over 650 people. We have now acquired six publications, five of which are home-delivered, saturation-targeted shoppers. Four of those publications are mailed, one is delivered by hand. Our publications reach over 2 million households weekly, of which 1.6 million are mailed. Our total annual mail volume is over 80 million, all mailed at Enhanced Carrier Route saturation rates.

Our shopper publications are local saturation advertising booklets mailed (and in some cases hand delivered) to 2 million addresses in the New York Metropolitan and Southern New Jersey markets, reaching approximately 98% of

- 1 the homes in the areas served. Our market covers Nassau and Suffolk Counties
- on Long Island, Brooklyn, Staten Island in New York, and the counties of
- 3 Burlington, Camden and Gloucester in southern New Jersey, across from
- 4 Philadelphia.

5 Our market is divided into 150 zones. Each zone contains approximately

6 12,000 residences. A separate and unique book is printed for each zone each

week. An advertiser can choose to run an ad in any one zone, any combination of

8 zones, or all 150 zones.

The content of our books is about 90% advertising, with 10% devoted to free community announcements, personal financial advice and history columns, horoscope, crossword and other puzzles, and reader contests. Advertising is in the form of display ads (picture ads) or reader ads (comparable to classified ads). The mailed books measure 11 x 7 inches and average 68 pages, with an average weight of about 2.6 ounces. Preprinted advertising circulars, commonly called "retail preprints" or "preprint inserts," are also inserted in the books. We average about 3 to 4 preprint inserts per book, mostly light-weight 1-4 page inserts from local or regional advertisers.

Our operations begin with the solicitation of advertisements by our sales force. We then prepare the graphics and layout work to design each zoned version of the books, and do our own printing. The books then go to the distribution area of our plant where the appropriate preprint inserts for each zone are inserted. The books are then strapped in bundles of 25, each with a facing slip denoting the carrier route number, the bundle number, and the total number of bundles and pieces for the route. The bundles are placed on wheeled containers as required by the Postal Service. Trays of carrier walk sequenced detached address labels for each zone are placed with the corresponding containers, together with a placard containing identifying information required by the Postal Service. We then

truck the mail directly to the destination post offices, stations and branches for delivery, using our own transportation.

The services that we provide go far beyond simply taking an order for advertising and producing mailings. The great majority of our customers, due to their small size and limited resources, have little or no advertising or marketing expertise. We work closely with them to define their marketing needs and objectives, to target their advertising coverage and frequency, and to design their ads to maximize effectiveness and response.

First, we help our customers understand and define their targeted marketing zones. We look at the nature of the customer's business in relation to advertising needs. We review the customer's sales records to determine the areas where most of its past business has come from, and recommend ways of obtaining additional sales data such as recording address or ZIP code information from sales. We use maps and demographic data by zone to identify the primary marketing area surrounding the customer's business location, matching the customer's business characteristics to demographic data, and taking into account other factors such as locations of the customer's competitors and areas for potential market expansion.

Second, we help to design an advertising program tuned to the customer's needs and resources. A lawn service with a seasonal business, for example, may require different ad frequencies and messages during the year, and we will even recommend additional services that they might offer and advertise during the offseason, such as leaf, mulching, and winter landscaping/cleanup services. For a small painting business that needs a steady stream of jobs, we may recommend a less expensive but weekly classified ad rather than a more expensive monthly display ad. Conversely, for a construction contractor that does larger projects, the monthly display ad may be the better choice.

Third, we help our customers create a strong advertising message to consumers that will drive a good response. In the case of a shoe store that was offering small discounts on selected shoes, we showed them that a stronger offer of "\$10 off on any shoes" would generate greater sales. For a tire store whose ads focused on sales of low-margin tires, we showed that advertising specials on their much higher-margin car services (oil changes and lube jobs) would generate higher profits. For a small grocer whose ads offered modest specials, we showed how offering super-bargain prices on selected items could generate more store traffic and sales. For a restaurant with a successful evening dinner business, we showed that advertising "early bird" specials for its off-peak 5-7pm period would generate business from senior citizens and price-conscious diners without diminishing their evening business.

Like all saturation mail programs, we know that our success as a business is linked to the success of our customers, and vice versa. The more affordable and effective their advertising is, the better their chances are to survive and grow as a business, and to continue or expand their use of saturation mail advertising.

#### THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE SATURATION MAIL ADVERTISING

Over my years in the saturation mail business, I gained a growing appreciation for the importance of affordable saturation advertising for small businesses. Now that I am running my own company, I have more contact with our customers and have seen even more closely how critical our form of advertising can be to the small business person or struggling entrepreneur. Many of our advertisers are one-person service businesses like the gutter cleaner or the handyman, or the entrepreneur trying to get started. These are not "pinstripe and briefcase" entrepreneurs, but hard working people trying to make a living. Their modest business is their primary or sole source of income. For them, effective

advertising can be the difference between success or failure, and the term
"affordable" advertising has a real pocketbook meaning.

Unlike larger businesses with multiple locations, high sales volumes, substantial advertising budgets, and advertising competitors clamoring for their business, the great majority of our customers have limited advertising choices. Broad coverage mass media like television and radio may work for the large retailer with stores through the market area, but not for the typical small business whose potential customers reside within a few miles of the store. Even the small service provider needs to generate nearby customers, as the time lost in traveling to jobs across the metro area increases costs and limits the number of jobs that can be done in a day. Similarly, advertising in newspapers may only reach subscribers, omitting an important segment of consumers, and may not be zoned finely enough to match the business's primary market area.

Many of these individuals and small businesses need to advertise frequently. The freelance plumber doing small jobs needs a steady flow of customers, perhaps four or five each day. Every day without work is a day without pay. The cost of advertising on a regular weekly or monthly basis becomes a major financial decision. Our typical small commercial classified ad customer, advertising weekly, may spend \$3,000 to \$4,000 annually. A business using our small display ads may spend \$10,000 to \$12,000 annually. These are very substantial amounts for such small businesses. For many of our customers, their advertising expenditures with our publications are their single largest cost of doing business.

In a broader sense, the ultimate customers of our mailing programs are consumers. I know that our publications are highly valued by recipients. Based on independent surveys, over 70 percent of adults in our New York market area read our publication, a readership that is higher than our competitors. This readership

is also confirmed by the high response we get from recipients to various contests and promotions that we run in our publications. The ultimate test of consumer acceptance is advertising response. We know from our customers that consumers do use and respond to the advertising in our programs. The significant repeat business from our existing customers and growth from new customers is the best indication of consumer responsiveness to our product.

The value to consumers goes beyond simply responding to ads. For value-conscious consumers (which today encompasses far more than just lower and middle-income households), saturation mail is an effective way to comparison shop and find good values. It also offers consumers the benefit of finding goods and services that are located in or near their neighborhoods, a convenience that for many time-pressed consumers is as valuable as a bargain price.

### SATURATION MAIL COMPETITION

Although small business advertisers are the heart of our publications, the long-term viability of our industry and customers depends in large measure on the extent to which we can compete for distribution of retail advertising preprints. The competition for these larger, highly sought retail advertisers is fierce. Daily newspapers, most of which offer total market coverage (TMC) programs to reach nonsubscribers via mail or private delivery, are generally the dominant competitors, although private delivery companies are also significant competitors in a number of markets, including the New York and Philadelphia markets we serve.

The single largest and dominant competitor for insert business in the Boroughs of New York is Distribution Systems of America (DSA), a hand delivery (alternate delivery) program which distributes to over 6 million households in the New York Metropolitan area. Every major retail preprint customer in the market (K-

1 Mart, Sears, all retail food and drug, etc.) delivers their preprints to households in

the Boroughs of New York through this program, not in the mail. In fact, since the

3 1987 postal rate increase, there have been no weekly or monthly saturation mail

programs serving the New York City boroughs. This is a growing and vibrant

private delivery program and a significant threat to direct mail programs since its

6 cost is dramatically lower than the use of mail.

In the Philadelphia market, there is a combination of direct mail and hand delivery (the hand delivery portion is growing) again offering significant cost advantages to the advertiser, to the detriment of the mail. Like the New York market, virtually all retail, food, drug and hard goods retailers inserts in the Philadelphia market are delivered by a combination of hand delivery and mail. The south Jersey market also has three suburban dailies, the Camden Courier Post, the Gloucester County Times, and the Burlington County Times, as well as the New Jersey edition of the Philadelphia Enquirer -- all with strong TMC programs.

## THE NEED FOR A LOWER, MORE REASONABLE POUND RATE.

The cost disadvantage of mail distribution vis-a-vis newspaper or hand-delivery services is due largely to the current rate structure for Enhanced Carrier Route mail, specifically the high pound rate above the 3.3-ounce breakpoint. Under current rates for Saturation ECR mail, postage for pieces above the breakpoint increases in a direct 1-to-1 ratio with increased weight, with postage doubling as the weight doubles. Although I am not a postal costing expert, I cannot imagine that postal handling costs above the breakpoint are purely weight-related, or even anywhere near the steep slope of the current pound rate.

The effect of this high pound rate on our ability to compete for inserts is dramatic. Unlike preprint insert rates of our non-postal competitors that increase only moderately as preprint weight increases, rates for mailed inserts must

increase steeply with weight to cover the high linear pound rate postage cost. The Postal Service's proposed pound rate will moderate, but not eliminate, this disparity. For traditional retail preprints, such as a 2-or-more-ounce circular typical of the major retail preprints carried in newspapers, even the lower pound rate would still leave us priced out of the market. The lower pound rate, however, would at least enable us retain the preprint business we currently have and help us compete at the margin for some portion of the lighter-weight preprint business, particularly under 1-ounce. 

I know from discussions with others in the saturation mail industry that the high pound rate is an impediment not only to attracting insert volumes but to expanding circulation in existing and new markets. The ability to generate preprint inserts is often a critical "go or no-go" factor in expanding or opening new markets.

I also believe that reduction of the pound rate to a more reasonable level will encourage free community papers and shoppers and perhaps even newspaper TMC programs that are currently hand delivered to consider returning to the mail. Ironically, a number of shoppers and free community papers that use private delivery previously used the mail, but were driven away by increased postal rates. The 1987 postal rate increase, in particular, had a dramatic impact on the saturation mail business. That increase caused the diversion of many previously-mailed newspaper TMC programs and shoppers from the mail into private delivery, and rapid growth of private delivery operations. Most if not all of the programs that shifted to private delivery were those with piece weights above the 3.3-ounce breakpoint, where the high pound rate created an artificially high cost spread between mail and hand delivery.

1 <u>CONCLUSION</u>

The Postal Service faces growing competition for many segments of its business, including saturation mail. In other segments, such as portions of First Class mail, the competition comes primarily from new communications technologies that offer greater speed or convenience, where price is less likely to be a decisive factor. In the case of saturation mail, the competition is a function of postal pricing.

The Postal Service's future in the saturation mail market depends on postal pricing decisions. The current saturation mail volumes and contribution cannot be taken for granted. Without affordable rates that allow mailers to compete in the marketplace, the Postal Service risks losing this price sensitive volume to newspaper competitors and to new or expanded private delivery operations. Existing mailers may also be forced to shift to private delivery, just as occurred following the Docket R87 rate increase. With affordable rates, saturation mail growth from existing mailers, and from former mailers that previously switched to private delivery due to increased postal rates (particularly the high pound rate), can offset declines in other volumes due to changes in communication technology.

On behalf of the Saturation Mail Coalition and the hundreds of thousands of businesses and individuals that use saturation mail advertising, I urge the Commission to recommend rates that will enable saturation mail to remain a vital and competitive advertising medium.

# Saturation Mail Coalition Members

Mail South, Inc. Helena, AL 35080

Arizona Pennysaver Group Tempe, AZ 85281

Tucson Shopper Tucson, AZ 85745

Harte-Hanks Shoppers Brea, CA 92621

ValuMail, Inc. Hartford, CT 06103

ADVO, Inc. Windsor, CT 06095

The Flyer Tampa, FL 33619

Today's Advantage Alton, IL 62002

PennySaver Publications Tinley Park, IL 60477

National Mail It Shreveport, LA 71118

Action Unlimited Concord, MA 01742

Berkshire Penny Saver Lee, MA 01238

Market America Corporation Baltimore, MD 21244

Impulse Publications Bel Air, MD 21050

The Maryland Pennysaver Hanover, MD 21076

Mail Marketing Systems, Inc. Jessup, MD 20794

Target Marketing Maine, Inc. Rockland, ME 04841

Metro Marketing Associates Eagan, MN 55121

Alliance of Independent Store Minneapolis, MN 55402

Alliance of Independent Store Mir Owners and Professionals

Advertising Preprint Distributors Jackson, MS 39289

## Saturation Mail Coalition Members

Advantage Mail Network Charlotte, NC 28208

PAGAS Mailing Service, Inc. Tarboro, NC 27886

Focus On Results Weddington, NC 28173

Eastern Marketing Services Durham, NH 03824

Target Direct NH, VT North Havehill, NH 03774

Independent News Pompton Lakes, NJ 07442

Decker Advertising, Inc. Delhi, NY 13753

Newport Media Hicksville, NY 11801

Yorktown Pennysaver Group Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

Rural Advertising Mail Philadelphia, PA 19134

Market Select Inc. Reading, PA 19605

The Reminder Coventry, RI 02816

CAP Medica Network Memphis, TN 38018

Coupon Concepts Waco, TX 76702

Winmill Publishing Corp. Brattleboro, VT 05302

Antigo Area Shoppers Guide Antigo, WI 54409

# CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have on this date served the foregoing document upon all participants of record in this proceeding in accordance with section 12 of the Rules of Practice.

Thomas W. McLaughlin

December 30, 1997